DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 868 FL 024 430

AUTHOR Cincotta, Madeleine Strong
TITLE Naturalising Linguistic Aliens: The Translation of Code-Switching.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at a University of Western Sydney Conference on Interpreting and Translation (Sydney, New South Wales, Australia, 1996).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Code Switching (Language); Dialects; Discourse Analysis; Foreign Countries; *Interpretive Skills; *Language Patterns; *Language Variation; *Translation

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses how to treat code-switching in translations. Examples include use of a word or phrase that is a common expression in the ordinary source language but comes from a related classical language (e.g., "terra nullius," a Latin phrase used in English, a word or expression borrowed from a dialect related to the source language (e.g., "bonny wee lass"), a word in the source language modified to indicate the speech of a specific geographic location or group (e.g., "nuffink" for "nothing"), or an expression from an unrelated language (e.g., "je ne sais quoi"). The "alien" expression may be a word, phrase, or entire passage. Four possible translation solutions are considered: making no distinction between the different source languages; keeping the transfer in the original source language; using a slang or colloquial form; and finding another language or dialect, a second target language for the passage. The last is seen as the most satisfying and difficult. Techniques for approaching the task are discussed, including considering the overall effect intended, the style or register or ten expression, and whether it is too commonly used to be translated. Contains 10 references. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 404 868

NATURALISING LINGUISTIC ALIENS:
The Translation of Code-Switching

Dr. Madeleine Strong Cincotta
University of Western Sydney,Macarthur

Within the field of literary translation it is sometimes claimed that there exist certain texts which, for one reason or another, are "untranslatable". This is the too hard basket to which some literary works are consigned, either relegating them definitively to a restricted local market, forever untranslated, or to that brand of literary translation disfigured at every turn by those shameful white flags known as translator's notes. One example of the sort of text frequently labelled this way are those which involve the use of a linguistic transfer, code-switching, that is, the author's placing within a passage of poetry or prose, or perhaps a section of film or theatre dialogue, of words, phrases, or indeed whole passages in a language or dialect other than that of the main body of the text. A colleague of mine has called these "linguistic aliens", hence the title of this paper. How are we to deal with such "aliens"? How do we "naturalise" them? Can they simply be left in their borrowed state, and if not, into what language or dialect do we translate them?

Examples of such language usage include a word or phrase which is a common expression used in the ordinary source language but which comes from a classical language related to it either linguistically or historically (e.g. the Latin expression "terra nullius" as used in English): a word or expression borrowed from a dialect related to the ordinary source language (e.g. "bonny wee lass"); or even a word in the source language modified so as to indicate the speech of a particular geographical location or social class, (e.g. "nuffink" for "nothing"). In some cases the author makes use of words or phrases from a completely separate language (e.g. "He is so attractive. He has a certain 'je ne sais quoi!'" The "alien" may be a single lexical item or even an entire passage.

There are, of course, only four possible solutions:

- 1) make no distinction between the two different source languages and keep the entire text in the same target language,

FL 024430

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Madeleine Strong Cincotta
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

- 2) keep the transfer in the original source language, i.e. the original second source language

- 3) use a slang or colloquial form of the main target language.

or

- 4) find another language or dialect, i.e. a "second" target language for the passage.

Most translators would try to avoid the first and obviously easiest solution because clearly, if there was a code-switch in the source text, something will be lacking in the translation if no such code-switch occurs. When Caroline Bingley, (of the topical Jane Austen novel Pride and Prejudice Penguin Books edition, 1972: p.77) states that "a *tete à tete* between two women can never end without a quarrel", few knowledgeable readers, let alone translation critics, would be satisfied with a single code rendition which would back-translate to "a private conversation between two women can never end without a quarrel."

It is tempting to be very literal and leave the transfer in its original source language. This would leave the code-switch intact, but would this solution convey the author's message at a deeper level? In his short story "Ma forse mi sbaglio" (the last story in the collection of the same name published by Montfort & Villeroy, Quebec: 1992, p. 157), the contemporary Italo-Canadian writer Antonio Alessio making reference to eggs and cholesterol, describes the baffled state of the modern consumer attempting to heed the best advice of nutritional science, which one week recommends that which a week later it forbids and which after a month goes back to recommending the same food as the ideal. In short, in the end the poor consumer has to start again *ab ovo.* The meaning of this Latin phrase is not as commonly known to English-speakers as it is to speakers of Italian. The code-switch, therefore, in English is an abrupt one, one which, since the actual meaning of the phrase will be unclear, can only signify something about the character who chooses to use such language, whereas in Italian it is a hilarious play on words and one which would not be above the linguistic abilities of the average reader.

What about using a slang or colloquial form of the target language? The Austrian literary translator Werner Richter, in his paper "Substituting Colloquialisms for Regional Dialects in

Literary Networks" (presented at the XIV World Congress of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs in Melbourne, 12-16 February 1996) proposes just such a solution. In the article "Modern Caribbean Literature: The Challenge of Translating Creole" also presented at the 1996 FIT Conference, Waltraud Kolb, while highlighting some of the difficulties of this approach, also suggests "the application of various levels of slang or dialect to the attempt to painstakingly recreate the phonetic chracteristics of the original". But is this really a viable solution? When the Nobel laureate Luigi Pirandello entitled one of his short stories: "I due compari", (Novelle per un anno 1, Le Opere di Luigi Pirandello Vol. 1, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milano: 1956, pp. 1239-1244) thus using the Sicilian dialect term for baptismal or confirmation sponsor as well as the "best-man" in a wedding party, he was well-aware that the term is also used in dialect as a title of respect like "Uncle" for someone who isn't actually the brother or brother-in-law of one's parent. It is also used by the baptismal or confirmation sponsor AND ALL OF HIS FAMILY to refer to the baptisee, the confirmee or the groom himself, and this "St. John's" relationship is carried on in both families to the seventh generation. This means that in small rural villages, eventually almost everyone is a "compare" of everyone else. Hence, sometimes the term simply refers to the "neighbours" or "the menfolk of the village". Since dear friends are often chosen as "compari", another meaning is that of a very close friend. One possible translation of the title of this short story could therefore be to use the Australian slang term for a friend, a "mate", hence: "The Two Mates", but surely that strikes a wrong chord. It is too Australian to be a Pirandello short story, just as the opposite-- Henry Lawson's first story: "His Father's Mate" would lose its Australian flavour if it were translated as "Il Compare di suo Padre".

The fourth solution, that of finding another language or dialect into which to translate the transfer, is certainly both the most satisfying as well as the most difficult. It is the most satisfying in that it keeps the code-switch and it is not limited to a particular linguistic register or geographical manifestation of the target language itself, but most importantly because it can respect the intention of the author himself when he chose to make use of a linguistic transfer. It is often the most difficult solution, however, because it involves the solving of what can be an extremely complex IQ test verbal analogy problem of the type a is to b as c is to what?.

In order to make use of this alternative, therefore, it is necessary not only to understand the author's original text in all of its nuances, but also to be thoroughly aware of the stylistic and literary devices which the author uses in order to achieve his desired effect. As is ever the rule in literary translation, it will be the intended effect which will take precedence over the particular linguistic device which the author has used to achieve it. This may at times call for some rather free translating, but the alternative is stilted, unnatural language or even non-text.

What does this mean in practice? Let us look at the first example of a trasfer given above: the use of Latin or Greek in an English text. Let us examine what intentions an author may have for borrowing a word or phrase from a classical language in this manner. I would suggest the following reasons:

- The word or phrase is so common in the target language as to have become for all practical purposes a part of the that language for the average native speaker, e.g. "When they found the body *rigor mortis* had set in." "He had trouble establishing his *bona fides*."

- The word or phrase is frequently used by members of a particular profession. e.g. a doctor's use of the phrase *"in extremis"* , a lawyer's *"in flagrante delicto"* or a Catholic priest's *Deo gratias!"*

- The word or phrase is a proverb in the classical language, but one so short and well-known that most native speakers of the source language would be familiar with it, e.g. *"Carpe diem."* or *"Tempus fugit."*

- The word or expression is not generally used in the source language except by those who are extremely well educated and/or of the upper classes or those who would like to appear so, e.g. "Well, of course, my dear, that goes without saying. I mean it is the *sine qua non* of good etiquette, is it not?"

In order to translate such transfers as these, it is necessary first of all to examine the text as a whole, as well as the individual passage in particular, in order to determine what effect the author was attempting to achieve by the use of the

transfer. Was it simply an "accidental" use of a word which the author no longer thought of as "borrowed" from the classical language since it is so often used in the source language? If this is the case, it will be necessary to either find a language which has the same Classical Language--> Descendent relationship to the target language and see if an equivalent frequently borrowed term can be found. If not, this may be the only time when the transfer may be safely ignored and an alternative expression in the target language chosen. This is because the phrase has already become so much a part of the source language that the reader may, in fact, not even notice the code-switch.

Is the phrase simply the "shop talk" of a particular profession? If so, then the equivalent "shop talk" must be used, whether or not it is borrowed from an equivalent classical language. This is important because this linguistic device has no meaning in itself. The author is merely using such a turn of phrase to inform or remind us in a reasonably subtle way of the character's or indeed the narrator's profession. If no linguistic device is available in the target language to accomplish this, perhaps because there is no equivalent profession in the target culture, another approach, of course, will be necessary, but of course in such a case, other aspects of the text will be problematic as well and the translation will probably require the introduction of words taken from the source language and skillfully woven into the target language, but this particular technique, which may often be necessary when translating between two vastly differing cultures, is beyond the scope of this paper.

If the word or phrase is a well-known saying, then obviously it cannot be "translated", it must be transposed, that is an equivalent proverb must be found. Otherwise, the result will often become not only clumsy but unintentionally humorous. The use of a proverb from a classical language, however, constitutes a "double-whammy" in that not only must an equivalent saying be found, but an equivalent classical language as well! However, the rule still applies: if the saying is what is important, then it is the saying which must be preserved (even if not in its literal meaning), while if it is the person's use of a phrase of classical language which is important, then that is what must be preserved even at the expense of the proverb. Any proverb in the classical language will do.

The last-listed function of the use of a classical language is the one which highlights the difficulties involved in the choice of classical language. The question we must answer in order to choose which language to use is: "What language holds the same relationship to the target language, as the transfer language does to the source language?" Is it a matter of historical linguistics, i.e. is the classical language the linguistic ancestor of the source language of the text? Is it a matter of political history, i.e. is the classical language politically dominant over the source language of the rest of the text? Does the transfer come from a language which holds an educational or class superiority to the source language? The answer to these questions will determine into what language we translate the "borrowed" expression.

Of course, it is not only from Classical languages that "borrowings" are made. Sometimes the transfer comes from a dialect of the source language. Again, the author's intentions must be examined. Why has she chosen to make use of a dialect rather than the standard language and why has she chosen this particular dialect for the transfer? In general, there are two reasons for making use of a dialect and often both are relevant to a single passage. Dialects are usually related to a particular geographical setting because the nature of dialects is that they be spoken in a specific and relatively limited part of an individual country. The use of dialect words or phrases or indeed whole passages may also involve the politics relevant in that geographical location. In addition, certain dialects are often used by the less well-educated in preference to the standard language of the nation. So, the author may use a dialect phrase in order to establish where the novel, the poem, the play or the short story is taking place. In this instance, the dialect may indeed be unsuitable to transfer to some other dialect because the geographical connotations will be ludicrous. If the characters in a work are speaking broad Australian in order to set the action in outback Australia, (as opposed to down-town London), it will not be possible to translate this into some rural dialect of Chinese since, obviously, the connotations this will call forth from the reader will be anything but Australian.

Similarly, if dialect is being used to indicate not so much geographical location as social class, the dialect or colloquial form of the target language into which to translate it must be chosen carefully or the results will be comical. If a French text has some "Parigot", the street version of Parisian French,

choosing American Black street language can only result in a very confusing text, to say the least. In most cases, a non-standard variety of the language with little or no geographical connotations will be necessary.

A good example of the clever use of differing dialect and style which respects the author's intentions is cited by Cait Murphy in her article "'Ulysses' in Chinese" (Atlantic Monthly, September 1995). Xiao Qian and his wife Wen Jieruo adapted Chinese styles to Joycean ones. "Molly, Leopold, and Stephen all have interior monologues, and all sound different. Molly is not very well-educated. She occasionally misuses difficult words, and her thoughts... have an earthy resonance. Stephen, the teacher and literary scholar, is philosophical. And Leopold is a middle-class bloke with a big heart who often thinks about sex and bowel movements. So in Chinese, Molly is rendered in working-class Beijing slang, Stephen mostly in classical Chinese, and Leopold mostly in a mixture of modern and classical that dates from the early twentieth century. By varying the styles, the translation manages to convey the diffences in character among the three."

Sometimes, rather than an actual dialect or language, the author chooses to use the source language but to modify it in order to simulate the speech of a foreigner or a resident of a particular town or region, to characterise a person as belonging to a particular social class, or even to simulate a speech defect. This usage must be approached in the same manner. The translator must determine what is the most important effect the author is trying to achieve? Is it the "foreignness" of the accent, or is the actual origin of the speaker relevant? If the author is using this modified language to convey the geographical origin of the speaker, the problem will parallel that of dialect usage. If it is simply a marker for social class (and that may, of course, be any social class), then the task of the translator is easier because all languages will have some marker which he can use. If the speech indicates some speech impediment, it is usually the fact that an impediment exists rather than the exact nature of the impediment itself which is important and so this may be varied so as to suit the phonological character of the target language. Sometimes a particular speech peculiarity is assumed by, or stereotypically associated with a particular group of people within a society, e.g. "Wodney" instead of "Rodney" among some English people or "brravo" --with a soft, palatal r, instead of "bravo" --with a flapped r as in standard Italian by some

Milanese with certain social aspirations to the "in" crowd. Occasionally, such speech peculiarities can be translated, or rather, transliterated, but sometimes there will simply be no exact equivalent and a speech defect, any speech defect, will have to do.

Sometimes, the transfer, or code-switch, involves a language which is totally "foreign" to the source language of the original text. Again, we must examine the author's intentions. Why has he chosen a "foreign" language and why has he chosen this particular one. If the important element is simply foreignness, then virtually any language will do. If there is a more specific reason behind the author's choice of THIS language, then once more, we have our IQ test linguistic analogy problem: what language has the same relationship to the target language as the language of the transfer has to the source language? What do we do, for example, with a phrase in French within an eighteenth century English text if we want to tranlate that text into Italian? During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries French was THE international, high prestige language not only in the English-speaking world but also in the rest of Europe. In this example, we might well leave the transfer in French and obtain the same effect in the target language as the author did in the source language. If the text were twentieth century, instead, the transfer would undoubtedly be into English as English is THE international prestige language in Europe in this century. Next century is anybody's guess! Perhaps it will be Chinese, or Spanish!

You may have noticed that certain questions remain unanswered: what is to be done with a dialect or language which is being used as a specific geographical tag? What is to be done when the answer to our linguistic analogy question is "no language", i.e. NO language has the same relation to the target language as the language of the transfer has to the source language? In such cases is the text "untranslateable" or should the translator have recourse to the dreaded TRANSLATOR'S NOTE? The answer of this translator is that in most cases this can be avoided. While it is true that no two languages can express precisely the same meaning in the same way, this does not signify, however, that the meaning cannot be expressed, only that the translator must be free to use different means, when necessary, in order to achieve the author's desired effect. If the author has used a dialect as her means of geographically locating

the action, it may be necessary to use a different technique to establish the location. If the author has used a particular mode of speech to indicate social class, it may be necessary for the translator to do this in some other way. Does this mean that the translation is somehow "unfaithful"? Should such a translation be considered a "different" work of art? I think that every translation is in a sense a "different" work of art for the very reason that the medium is different. A literary translator must be a capable writer before she can be a capable translator, but she must be a humble one as well as a sensible one so that the work of the author is never overshadowed. Is this possible? Yes, it certainly is. Is it easy? No, it is a struggle, an incredibly daunting challenge, but it is only through achieving the difficult balance between faithfulness and creativity that great works of literature can be transmitted to all.

As Cait Murphy concludes in her "Ulysses" article cited above: "The texture may not--cannot--be exactly the same in Chinese as in English, but it is possible to get a ... true sense of it."

****

REFERENCES

Alessio, A., "Ma Forse Mi Sbaglio", short story in the volume entitled Ma Forse Mi Sbaglio, Montfort & Villeroy, Inc. Editeurs, Québec: 1992.

Austen, J., Pride and Prejudice, Penguin Classics, London: 1972.

Kolb, W., "Modern Caribbean Literature: The Challenge of Translating Creole", paper presented at the XIV World Congress of the Fédération Internationale des Traducteurs, Melbourne, 12-16 Feb. 1996 and to be published in the Conference Proceedings.

Murphy, C., "Ulysses in Chinese", Atlantic Monthly, September 1995.

Pirandello, L., "I due compari" in vol. 1 of the collected works of L.P. Le Opere di Luigi Pirandello, Novelle per un anno 1, Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, Milan: 1956.

Richter, W., "Substituting Colloquialisms for Regional Dialects in Literary Networks", paper presented at the XIV World Congress of the Fédération Internationale del Traducteurs, Melbourne, 12-16 Feb. 1996 and to be published in the Conference Proceedings.

OTHER ARTICLES OF INTEREST

Barbe, Katharina, "The Translation of Loans: Anglicisms in German", Perspectives: Studies in Translatology, N. 2, p. 147-60, 1994.

Kassai, Georges, "Traduction et néologie", Méta, Vol. 26., P. 123-34, Jun. 1981.

Sebastian, Robert N., "On Translating French Occurring in English in to Spanish", Hispania, Vo. 72, No. 3, P. 705-15, Sept. 1989.

Zucker, George K., Problems of Translation of Judeo-Spanish Texts, Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, (73rd, Chicago, Il. August 7-11), and published in the Conference Proceedings.